# Kerala in Crisis

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The present political crisis in the tiny state of Kerala may well affect the entire political development of India and also influence Communist international strategy throughout the Middle and Far East. Kerala, located on India's southwest coast and embracing the former princely states of Travancore and Cochin, and the Malabar coast, is the smallest of the fourteen states of India and has the distinction of being the only one in which the Communist Party controls the state government. In 1957 after the last election, Kerala's fifteen million people gave the Communist Party a substantial plurality (some thirty-five percent of the total votes cast) which its leaders were able to convert into a legislative majority by forming an alliance with independents and several Communist followers in the state parliament. Kerala is in many ways a unique state in India. Heavily populated (about a thousand persons per square mile), approximately fifty-three percent of its people are Hindu, one third Christian, and the balance principally Muslim. Its Christian population includes a Catholic community dating back many centuries, as well as more recently established Protestant groups converted by missionaries from Great Britain, Germany, Canada and the United States during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The liberal outlook of the Maharajas of Travancore and Cochin permitted the Roman Catholic, Syrian Christian, Nestorian Christian and various Protestant sects to flourish in the area. Moreover, Jews migrating to the Malabar region of Kerala found a religious haven there. The Hindus in Kerala have followed traditional South Indian caste lines, the Brahmin group being noted for its conservative orthodoxy in religion and the Nairs for their emphasis upon commerce, education, tolerance and social service. As a result, a significant percentage of the population have either followed or been exposed to the liberal traditions of a JudeoChristian set of cultural values and have fought with zeal to protect what they conceived to be their rightful heritage.

Kerala is also different from all other parts of India (with the possible exception of West Bengal) in its marked emphasis on education by the various communities. Approximately seventy percent of the people are literate and newspapers abound. The people, even including those in the lowest rungs of the social and economic ladder, are relatively well informed on the political happenings in the nation. They have decided opinions on

political issues and personalities. It is not at all unusual to find the lowly sweeper reading a daily newspaper in the local Malayalam tongue. Evening will find groups of men from all walks of life in the coffee shops or clubs discussing political issues. This thirst for knowledge extends to a demand for education which is not without its problems. All levels of society are keenly aware of the need to educate the younger generation to supply India's urgent need for technical personnel in its development programs. Colleges are overcrowded and places in professional schools are so scarce that parents willingly sell their most prized possession, their ancestral lands, in order to secure admission into the university professional schools for their children.

Women also play an important role in the state. Although South Indian women are in some respects less emancipated than some of their urbanized northern sisters in matters of Western dress, smoking, "dating" and social contacts, they nevertheless play a prominent role in both family and public life. Until recently a matrilineal system of descent prevailed, the property inheritance rights of the family being traced through the female rather than the male line. Although the state statute has now erased the distinction between sexes concerning inheritance rights, custom dies hard and many families still follow the time-honored tradition of having property settlements made through the female line. Kerala proudly boasts of its equality of womanhood, pointing to its first female state Surgeon-General appointed many years ago, to its present state Supreme Court Justice, its female ministers and legislators, and to its own charming and brilliant Mrs. Lakshmi Menon, India's present deputy Minister for External Affairs.

People in Kerala today are acutely aware of their heritage and are both bitter and aggressive. Basically this resentment is founded upon the marked lack of opportunity which exists for economic advancement and social recognition for most citizens. Although Kerala has rich resources in its tea, rubber, coffee, monozite, thorium, cashew nut and coir industries, these are not sufficient to statisfy the pressing demands for employment. As a result, Kerala is one of the states most hard hit by unemployment of educated people. College graduates are painfully aware that the future holds little prospect for them to live a better life despite their own ability and effort. Embittered with what they consider the lack of effort on the part of the Congress Party to bring them such opportunities, they have increasingly turned towards the Communist Party for salvation. In part, the bitterness of the college student is typical of all India: having been drawn into the political struggle for independence with the express approval of Gandhi and, having proved to be successful agitators for independence, university students have long been used by the Congress and other parties to promote party ends and to make political capital out of student affairs. In the summer of 1958 Kerala experienced one of its worst student strikes, fomented by both the Congress

and the Communist Parties, over the withdrawal of a student boat-travel concession which had been in effect for many years. Although the political parties continue to pay lip service to neutrality in student affairs, today their actions belie their words. In the last student body election in the University of Kerala in Trivandrum the Communist-dominated student group was decisively defeated by the anti-Communists only with the outside help of non-Communist party aid.

Communist success in Kerala cannot be solely explained in terms of the traditional European or American Communist experiences. The causes of Communist progress are rooted in part in the character of Indian culture and its present attempts to break with the past, partly in the character of the Kerala Congress Party, and partly in Kerala's peculiar economic and social conditions which provide a fertile field for Communist efforts. The principles of Hindu philosophy and religion are so broad and tolerant that they provide no opposition to the economic principles of Marxism. In a cultural setting in which society is viewed as a collective organism which operates for the benefit not of the individual but of all, Marxism seems to provide a convenient cultural means of continuing the old value structure with the new and advantageous features of abolishing the caste system and pressing for economic justice. The personal history of the present Chief Minister of Kerala, E. M. S. Namboodiripad, is a testimonial to the effectiveness of this development. A high Namboodiri Brahmin, active in the Congress movement until 1939, the Chief Minister has said there is no inconsistency between Hinduism and Communism and that the two are philosophically in sympathy. The embittered and educated groups in Kerala see in Communism a continuation of the Hindu way of life with none of the objectionable features of caste, absentee landlordism, and the political corruption of the Congress Party at the national level. For them, the Communist Party appears as the only available means of attaining a social order in which economic justice and political equality will prevail. For the masses who live in the backward Indian villages, Communism has a far more important concrete reality. Earning less than the equivalent of sixty dollars annually, living as tenants, sharecroppers or daily-wage field hands, and at the mercy of the landlord, existing on a subsistence diet of rice, or only tapioca, with no opportunity for improvement of their lot, these villagers can easily be persuaded that Communism provides the way to a better life. For these classes, the philosophical goals of Communism are consistent with the doctrines of justice, love and duty as preached by their venerated Gandhi. They do not realize the dangers of a Communist system of society. For them the rape of Hungary and the violence of Chinese Communism in Tibet seem far away and irrelevant to their own problems.

The spectacular success of the Communist Party in Kerala is partly due to the

weaknesses of the Congress Party itself. In the pre-independence period, Kerala was divided into two princely states, Travancore and Cochin, each ruled by a maharaja who was politically liberal by contemporary standards. British influence was secured by political control over the ruling family and parts of the administrative machinery of the states. Progress was made in education, municipal service and to a limited extent, in social welfare. During the independence movement, however, this region did not provide a strong nucleus of power for the Congress Party movement which dominated the national scene. As a result, Congress leaders from Kerala have not been influential in the councils of the national party organization. Moreover, when independence came and the Congress was voted into power, Kerala congressmen did not conduct themselves in such a manner as to gain the confidence and support of the masses. First, the leadership of the Kerala party so behaved as to support the charge that it was corrupt. There was, and continues to be, growing belief that the Kerala Congress Party is run by dishonest politicians wedded to capitalism, in the control of the landed castes, and paralyzed by red tape. This belief is supported by many illustrations of political pay-offs, administrative slothfulness and outright bribery of public officials in Congress party organizations. There is a widespread belief that Congress statements on land reform, on socialization of the economy, and on a better way of life are hypocritical talk if measured against actual Communist performance in Kerala in passing a land reform act, and in raising salaries of government employees, and pressing toward internal social improvement. There has also been widespread resentment by many people of the Congress leaders who lived in mansions and rode around in shiny limousines. Of exceptional importance was the failure of the Congress Party to gain the confidence and support of the lower castes, such as the Ezevahs, in the rural areas by its failure to push the various programs sought by these groups.

After the last general election the Kerala Congress leaders mistakenly believed that the newly formed Communist ministry would not be capable of continuing to operate the government and would fall, leaving Congress to take control once again. That the Communist Party did not make such errors was an indication of the astuteness and efficiency of its leadership. During their period of control in Kerala, the Communist leaders strengthened their position with the electorate while simultaneously weakening the opposition, all in an effort to prepare for a greater election victory in 1962. How has this been done? First, the Communists have used the traditional methods of nonMarxian parties in democratic countries. By serving the masses, providing lawyers and assistance in litigation, catering to the economic needs of village low castes, vigorous enforcement of the rights of tenants, sharecroppers, and agricultural daily laborers, and by patronage appointments, it has built a hard core of party supporters who have been placed under a bond of

obligation to support the party. For example, a Christian cook (with nine votes in his family) who formerly voted for the Congress, has become a staunch Communist supporter ever since the party prevented his eviction from his rented home and the sale of his few possessions for being delinquent in rent. These examples might be multiplied. Their importance becomes clear when it is realized that public opinion in India is largely molded, not by radio and television and newspaper media as in the West, but by word of mouth and a belief in charismatic types of leadership. In a society in which there is little outlet for diversion, political affairs and personal happenings are the topics of conversation for many hours. The assistance given by the Communist Party under such circumstances becomes exaggerated and the prestige of both the local Communist worker and the party are enhanced. In the end both the contribution of the voter, his support of the party, and the loyalty which was won over are all magnified and the party emerges as the image of the masses in the mind of the individual voter.

But peaceful persuasion and providing services are not the only means by which the Communists have gained supporters. Were this the only way, Congress could find greater opportunity to outstrip the Communists since the national government could play a greater role in the lives of the people through its various programs in education, economic improvement, community development and public health. The Communists in Kerala, however, also offer the masses a combination of education and philosophical indoctrination. Cheap books, pamphlets and newspapers written in the local tongue (Malayalam) are subsidized by the Soviet Union and carry the propaganda message to the people. For example, a two-volume edition of Marx's Capital sells for the equivalent of a dollar and a half while a comparable American work retails closer to six dollars. Communist-printed media of communication are written simply, often by local well-known writers, tell an interesting story and always convey a Communist propaganda moral. Such materials may be used to teach reading to the illiterate and are available for all grades. These books, attractively illustrated and bound, are sent from Russia, Roumania and Czechoslovakia. Their cost is usually less than twelve American cents. In the villages, these book are used in a highly sophisticated manner. Because of the scarcity of books it is not at all unusual to find small groups listening to a reading by some member of the Communist Party. In the small shops where workers are congregated, such literature is often read to the workers while they work. The outcome of this entire process is a well-informed, alert and highly indoctrinated corps of workers supporting the party. This enlarged and informed body of Marxian public opinion will inevitably play a vocal role in Kerala's political future. This group of Communist supporters is now being given a new role: stealing the thunder of the Congress Party's support for local home rule, the Communists in Kerala have sponsored a panchayat bill providing home rule

for villages and rural areas; its passage, which seems assured, will provide a political nucleus for Communist power so that even if the party is later defeated at the state level, it will have strong local organizational bases and political strongholds to which to retire.

Communist leadership in Kerala realizes its own responsibility for party success. The Chief Minister has given his personal wealth to the Communist cause and has lived simply and without ostentation. In a recent pamphlet he has stressed the small amount he has claimed for housing from the government as compared with the large sums claimed by his Congress predecessors in office. Communist office-holders are known for their personal integrity and incorruptibility, although there is a widespread belief that a contribution to the party coffers will speed action and produce desired results. Nevertheless, Kerala has had no major scandal under the Communists which the opposition could effectively exploit. The one partial exception to this was the famous rice deal in which the Kerala Government purchased rice (from a Madras firm which had allegedly contributed to the Communist party) at a price higher than that generally prevailing in order to curtail a rice shortage in the state. Even here, however, an impartial investigation disclosed waste and error of judgment rather than criminal conduct. Communist ministers continue to dispense with armed guards to protect their homes and avoid riding in expensive limousines. Even now, only a single sentry guards the compounds of the ministers more for the purpose of warding off beggars and curious viewers than for the purpose of protection. In recent months there has been some grumbling about the increased number of cars in the official world but this complaint is not of any significant dimensions.

Closely allied to official integrity is the sense of urgency in government. Although administration in Kerala is still tortoise-like in comparison with good Western standards, there is a widespread feeling that the machinery of government has been speeded up and made more efficient. Leaders of the Revolutionary Socialist Party (claiming three million voters' support) and of the Socialist and Congress Parties may point to errors and delays in administration, yet after hearing the lively debate in the state legislature (in Malayalam and English) on such charges, one must conclude that the ministers have done their homework and are ably prepared to defend their conduct.

The Communists in Kerala effectively publicize their efforts on behalf of the voters. Recently when they decided to erect rest-homes for some 3,500 veterans, this decision was widely heralded as a great step forward. Any Communist success in encouraging private investment in the state is trumpeted as a great step in solving Kerala's greatest problem,

unemployment. In addition, the government has sanctioned studies of local and state administration by responsible academic institutions with a view to increasing efficiency. Although the Communists have vigorously pushed their programs, they have not attempted to seize control of the state civil service. The present senior civil servant still retains the traditional powers of his office although the Chief Minister has publicly said that the civil service should not question the wisdom or the constitutionality of the acts of the government but merely carry out whatever orders are handed down. Some efforts have been made to substantiate the charge of Communist subversion of the administrative machinery of the state by pointing to the appointment of Communist Party members to be personal aides to the ministers. The only significant and publicized case of interference in administration, however, was that of a local magistrate who was transferred from one post to another after he had refused to follow the dictates of a local Communist leader in disposing of a criminal case before him. The failure of the Communists to seize the administrative machinery of government may be explained by the high prestige of the Indian Civil Service in national opinion and by the arsenal of powers, both legal and political, possessed by the central government in the event of such an attempted coup.

Kerala Communists have repeatedly said they will continue to govern within the framework of the existing constitutional system. These statements have followed in the wake of the Amritsar Declaration of 1957 in which the Communist Party of India solemnly stated that it would operate solely by legal means. Kerala Communists have dutifully followed this line. The Chief Minister has often said that his regime would continue to run the government until the next general election so long as it is able to muster a parliamentary majority. In spite of these protestations, however, there have been repeated acts of violence by both Communists and anti-Communists within the state. Communist-dominated unions in the All India Trade Union Congress (AINTUC) and the Congress-controlled Indian National Trade Union Congress (INTUC) have repeatedly clashed in the plantation and industrial areas in the state. Widespread violence has occurred often during political rallies. Charges of improper use of police to break up anti-Communist political meetings have been made by anti-Communist leaders. In one meeting at Chandanathope where the police fired at a rioting crowd (with the resulting death of seven persons), an official report following an impartial investigation of the event condemned the tendency on the part of the state administration to place an emphasis on violence.

There have also been many reports of widespread violence, intimidation and political murders throughout the state. English plantation managers have protested in vain against union threats or acts of violence. Their request for police protection has gone unheeded on the grounds that it is against state

policy to prevent workers from airing their just grievances in labor disputes against employers. This policy has been applied to allow violence to occur, especially where Communists might benefit, whereas protection is provided in any situation in which their interests would be harmed. As a result, Christian anti-Communists have felt themselves threatened in the exercise of their rights and have felt personally insecure. For self-protection one such group, known as "The Christophers," has been created and has on several occasions beaten off attacks against anti-Communist Christians meeting in rural areas. Communists in turn have accused them of being subsidized by foreign interests and have levelled the charge of "subversive" against them. These chaotic conditions have created a general state of insecurity or a break-down in law and order and have provided anti-Communists with an excuse to demand that the central government intervene and assume control of the government in order to restore law and order and bring back a feeling of security among the people isolated in the villages and country-side.

The Communists have often stated that many of Kerala's difficulties result from the unwillingness of the other political parties to recognize the Communist Party as a legitimate political organ. Mr. Namboodiripad has repeatedly charged that anti-Communists have tried to destroy his party and that they have acted just as Communists in Kerala have acted in many states which the Congress Party controls, for instance in Andhra State. He has charged that Kerala was being discriminated against in the paltry amount of capital poured into the state by the national government and that this was part of an organized effort to discredit Communism in Kerala by starving the state economically and failing to help alleviate unemployment. To offset this charge of discrimination, Communists have loudly proclaimed their limited success (as in the agreement with the Birla firm to establish a plant in Kerala) in attracting private capital to relieve unemployment. The attempts of the Chief Minister to obtain Russian help were widely publicized during his trip to Moscow to attend the recent meeting of the Communist International Congress. More recently the Chief Minister has repeatedly complained that the National Congress Party discredited his ministry by not supplying rice stocks to meet Kerala's food needs while simultaneously satisfying the requirements of states in which Congress ministries were governing.

The present campaign of violence and demonstrations in Kerala is directly related to these issues although the immediate cause lies in the enforcement of the Kerala Education Act. It concerns the basic question of whether the processes of democratic government have been subverted to such a degree as to justify intervention by the central government and also involves the question of whether the Kerala Congress Party can reorganize itself from the grass roots level in sufficient time to win the state elections in 1962. The Education Act which touched off the campaign of violence was first passed in

1957 shortly after the Communists came into power. It was subsequently examined in the Ministries of Law and Education of the national government. Because there was some doubt as to the constitutionality of several sections of the Act, the Supreme Court of India (under Article 143 of the Constitution) gave an advisory opinion that certain sections were offensive under the Constitution. As a result, the relevant sections were corrected and the act became operative early this year. The Act itself is primarily aimed at securing greater control over the administration of some 7,000 state-aided private schools, run principally by the Nair and Christian communities which see in the Act a loss of control over their schools, students, and teaching program. Although the schools are private, they have been, and continue to be, state-aided. The Act and the pertinent administrative regulations would require that the schools hire teachers from an approved civil service list; empower the government to acquire the schools after seven days' notice; require the reservation of seats for backward and depressed sections of the populace; prohibit proselytization; prohibit the use of schools for prayer houses; limit corporal punishment; and would prohibit teacher and student participation in strikes and public movements which might result in ill-feeling among sections in the community. Control over the teachers would be increased by the rule that such an employee would be disqualified from teaching if he had taken part in any unlawful agitation against the authority of government. The Act also seeks to control what is taught so that there will be not only an increase in efficiency in education but also a control over the values and standards embodied in educational content. While the Nair and Christian community leaders in the private school system engage in demonstrations, satyagrahas and petitions to the government, the agitation embraced the broader demand that the government which sponsored the Act should resign from office.

The Communists in Kerala would not resign from office so long as they could command a legislative majority. When this writer interviewed the Chief Minister, he was told the Kerala Ministry would remain in office as a test case to show that democracy can operate with Communist political parties. The vigorous way in which the Communists reacted in the present crisis showed their desire to continue in office. Their rejection of Prime Minister Nehru's suggestion to resign and seek re-election immediately was rejected out of hand without hesitation.

What of the prospects of intervention by the central government? Under the Constitution the centre may intervene in the administration of a state government after a proclamation of emergency has been issued by the President of India, or when a two-thirds majority of the Upper House of Parliament (the Council of States) has declared that it is necessary or expedient in the national interest to do so. Both powers are limited to specific

time periods and thus raise the question of future political action when the emergency power expires. In the summer and autumn of 1958 when agitation and unrest, strikes and labor-management unrest were rife, there were loud demands that Nehru visit the state to observe conditions for himself and that he institute presidential rule. Instead, U. N. Dhebar (then President of the National Congress Party) visited the state and counselled the Kerala Congress Party leaders to be cautious in making such rash demands. After rejection of the demand for presidential intervention, the Kerala Congressmen, the Kerala Praja Socialists led by Pattom Thanu Pillai, and the Revolutionary Socialist Party, all increased direct pressure upon the state government to resign. After the outbreak of violence which arose during the Education Act crisis, Prime Minister Nehru arrived in Trivandrum, the capital city of Kerala, to study events there at the invitation of the Chief Minister. This visit gave him the opportunity to meet more of the local political leaders, to judge the sentiment of the masses, and also to get more specific information on the charge that the Communist government had created a feeling of general insecurity in the minds of the masses by fostering an atmosphere of lawlessness and disorder.

Although Nehru suggested that the Communists obtain a fresh mandate to govern by holding a new election, he refused to accede to the demands for presidential intervention. Presidential rule is no solution to the present problems which Kerala faces. [1] The past history of non-cooperation of the opposition parties in the state makes a political future based upon any agreement to cooperate of questionable value. The low prestige of the leaders of the Kerala Congress Party, and the absence of candidates who will attract the interest and support of the masses of voters, makes it doubtful that the Congress Party will succeed at the next state election. Also, charges by the Communists that they had been forced out of office rightfully theirs by a constitutional trick would be a serious matter to reckon with, especially if they were linked with the claim that presidential rule in Kerala was a denial, rather than a vindication, of democratic government. Moreover, even if all these objections were overcome, there is no assurance that the Communists would be defeated at the next election. A Communist victory after presidential rule in Kerala would be a serious loss of prestige for both Nehru and the Congress.

But there is another factor to consider. Nehru's broad aim of joining hands with all parties, groups and viewpoints in order to deal with the common problems of India makes him most reluctant to ambush the Communists. Last year Nehru made it abundantly clear to John Foster Dulles that, while he might not agree with Communism, he was opposed to fighting "isms" as such and that he welcomed any group with which he could work. The Communists in Kerala have enacted many measures which are endorsed and supported by

the National Congress Party, including a new land reform act which limits land holding to fifteen acres, a vigorous program to encourage producer-cooperatives along socialist lines, a tenant protection statute, and they have laid increased emphasis on community development and internal improvements. Nehru's desire to utilize the effectiveness of non-Congress Marxian parties to further his goals was a factor in his reluctance to impose presidential rule in Kerala.

However, the crucial issue in Kerala is the ability of the Communist government to hold its majority and carry on the processes of government in a peaceful, lawful manner. As long as it could do this, the burden of the responsibility for ousting it rests with the opposition and especially the National Congress Party. Endorsement of direct action by means of violence, demonstrations, satyagrahas, or threats against the state government is a dangerous precedent which may lead to trouble in other areas of unrest, in nearby Andhra, or in West Bengal where there is a strong likelihood that Communist ministries will be voted into power at the next election. Any national rule by decree in Kerala would give further credence to the belief (now prevalent in many quarters in India) that the Congress is more concerned with perpetuating itself in power than with the free choice of the electorate.

Although the 1962 elections are a good way off, making any speculation a risky business, the existence of certain political phenomena permits the drawing of tentative conclusions. First, the past two years have witnessed the creation of an efficient party organization by the Communists. The system is in close contact with the masses, especially the lower castes in the countryside. The importance of this rural group is immense since in the last analysis it will determine the outcome of the elections. What is significant is that there has been much talk in the Kerala Congress Party about the need to re-establish contact with these mass groups, but little actual work has been done in this direction. If one judges by the past conduct of the state Congress Party, it is possible to predict further Congress losses in the Kottayam area, as well as in the industrialized areas northward in the Calicut regions. The Communists are also likely to improve their showing in the agricultural plantation areas in Manantoddy, Palghat, Chittur, Munnar and Kottarakara regions since strong Communist-controlled union drives in these regions have been making significant headway in the organization of agricultural laborers. These organizations will be utilized efficiently in mobilizing the Communist votes.

These Communist gains do not automatically insure victory at the polls. Combined action by the opposition political parties could turn the tide. What is needed to achieve this? First, Congress and other political parties will have

to strengthen and further develop their local political structures so as to keep the masses better informed and to be able to propagandize them. This basic aim, however, cannot be achieved where the local political leadership is stagnant in its desire to retain control over party organization rather than to develop an alert and aggressive corps of party workers who might challenge the existing leadership. This problem is particularly serious for the Congress in Kerala. Secondly, anti-Communist parties in the state will need to develop a joint program of strategy in the next campaign, necessarily including an agreement on slates of candidates who will be supported by the coalition, an acceptable platform on which to campaign, an agreement to divide the ministries if victory is achieved, and a specific legislative program. It would also help the cause if these state parties obtained concerted support from the national headquarters of their respective party organizations. Although the Kerala Congressmen have already taken the first step in this program, it is doubtful whether full concerted action will ever be achieved. In December 1958, they reached an understanding with the other non-Communist democratic political parties to avoid any three-cornered races in the forthcoming local elections. However, in the present Education Act crisis no such agreement was reached and the Praja Socialists under Pattom Thau Pillai have repeatedly stated their determination to carry on a program of direct action against the state government even though the Congress leadership obeys the orders of its national headquarters to quit the violence campaign. Differences in political doctrine, an inability to agree upon a joint program, the unacceptability of candidates for office by these parties, and the unwillingness of the party leaders to share control in making decisions, all these factors make the chances of a concerted program appear dismal.

But even if such a concerted effort could be carried on, it is unrealistic to believe that the Communists will sit idly and do nothing. In the last state elections their success was partly due to their ability to work with independent candidates. In the past year some independents with Communist backing have won office in local elections. It would appear that a Communist pattern of action in supporting independent candidates is developing not only in Kerala but also in other parts of India, as in Madras, Bombay and Uttar Pradesh. Communist backing of these independents is obtained by offering, in elections, support for the programs espoused by these candidates and posts in the various state ministries. Malayalees in Kerala who are becoming increasingly disgusted with all political parties may well turn to supporting these independent candidates. The election of even a handful of such candidates, together with moderate success of Communist candidates, would probably return the Namboodiripad Ministry after the next election with a greater margin of victory than before. It is an unhappy state of affairs that the Pandora's Box of Communism in India should be opened by means of the democratic ballot in the state having the highest cultural standards in the

nation. It is even more depressing to contemplate the possibility of the spread of Communism to at least two other states after the next election returns are tabulated.

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1. See postscript for subsequent events.

# Postscript

On July 30, 1959, President Rajenda Prasad announced the ousting of the Communist Government of the state of Kerala after the recommendation of Mrs. Indira Gandhi (President of the Indian Congress National Party and also the daughter of Prime Minister Nehru) and the additional consideration of the Working Committee and the Parliamentary Board of the Congress Party. The ultimate governmental responsibility for the action rested with the Indian Cabinet, which made the decision during its meeting of July 28 and then proceeded to set in motion the necessary constitutional machinery. [1] Prompt notification of the decision was relayed to the Chief Minister of Kerala, Mr. E. M. S. Namboodiripad, and subsequently the powers of government were formally transferred to the Indian Civil and administrative servants on duty in the state. Authority for this drastic action lies in Article 356 of the Indian Constitution which contains emergency provisions permitting the President to undertake the rule of a state when he is satisfied that the government of that state cannot be carried on in accordance with the provisions of the Constitution. He is required subsequently to obtain parliamentary sanction for his action within a two-month period. Rule by presidential decree covers a maximum of six months, but may be extended for subsequent six-month periods. The decree of presidential rule in Kerala was careful to omit a direct charge that the Communists had subverted democratic principles of government, but instead pointed out that the Ministry was unable to operate in a situation in which these principles were widely and flagrantly disregarded. It further provided for holding interim elections as soon as possible.

Although the decree avoided the explicit charge that the Communists had failed to act in a constitutional manner, there is no doubt that such was the intention of the decree as judged by its effect since the central government could have utilized the nation's armed forces to preserve domestic peace and tranquillity and to keep the Communist Ministry in power in Kerala if it had felt that the Government was not blameworthy. The problems raised by the imposition of presidential rule are greater than those solved by it. The cardinal issue raised is whether unconstitutional means have been utilized to oust a democratically elected Communist Party. Set against the backdrop of Middle East and South East Asian events, presidential rule in Kerala is further

evidence of the trend away from democratic processes and toward dictatorial rule by individual or faction. The Communists in India are already charging the ruling Congress Party with anti-democratic acts in ousting the Kerala Communists and have begun to stage parliamentary agitations through the walk-out technique. A reconsideration of the Indian Communist Party's Amritsar declaration on non-violent methods may well be occasioned by this event. Undoubtedly, Communist agitation and propaganda will now begin (indeed they have already begun) to take a stiffer line against the Congress Party in West Bengal, Andhra, and in other parts of India. When the next special elections in Kerala under presidential rule are held, Communist success will depend on the extent to which they will have convinced the masses that they are the beacon-carrier of democracy and that the Congress is autocratic in philosophy. Whatever the outcome of the election may be, there will have been a widening disillusionment with the practices of the Congress Party and an increase of public scepticism about the Indian political process itself.

August 31, 1959

1. This decision was based upon a report of the Governor of Kerala (Dr. B. Ramakrishna Rao) to President Rajendra Prasad. The report contained a detailed analysis of events leading to his conclusion that the Communist Government of Kerala had lost the support of the majority of the people in the State. These events included the mass release of prisoners including thirty-four sentenced for murdering policemen; interference in the administration of the police force with its attendant demoralization of administrative morale; police interference in the labor-management disputes; government support of Communist unions in their jurisdictional fights with nonCommunist unions; meddling with the civil service; the use of Government-sponsored producer-cooperative societies to promote the interests of the Communist Party; brutality and violence in suppressing the student agitation over the withdrawal of a boat-fare concession; unwise financial policies; and the enactment of the unpopular Education Act regulating private schools. Governor Rao concluded the Communists had utilized the administrative machinery of Government to consolidate its gains at the expense of the other parties. He expressed the belief that if the situation were left uncorrected, serious consequences would follow, and concluded that the administration of the state could no longer be carried on in accordance with the Constitution. The official summary of his report appears in The *Hindu Weekly Review*, August 24, 1959, p. 16.